

Fire Performance and Safety

Displays of fire torch swinging look great! The flames leave dramatic patterns against the darkness and it was the circular trails of torches that inspired me to learn club swinging. Fortunately, it is not that much more difficult to swing fire torches than ordinary clubs, except that **you must constantly bear safety in mind.**

Fire torches can be bought from juggling retailers - see the equipment chapter on pages 89-90 for details. Torch designed for fire juggling or fire swinging are both equally good provided that there is a knob firmly attached. Before trying your torches lit, get used to practising with them unlit in daylight. Next try swinging them lit in daylight. Particularly if you want to throw and catch the torches, when you first start to manipulate lit torches at night, make sure you are close to a source of light to see the handles of the clubs.

It is a good idea to wear a hat and tie long hair back. You should take off loose clothing, warm up and ensure that there is sufficient space around you before beginning your session. Always practise fire outside, in a clear area away from buildings, vehicles, tents or other flammable objects.

Safe Fuels

Use paraffin (or kerosene). Paraffin can be bought from selected petrol filling stations and hardware stores. This fuel is coloured blue or pink, burns with a yellow flame and gives off quite a lot of smoke. Barbecue lighter fluid is an alternative. It is more expensive and burns hotter than paraffin but with less smoke. Coleman fuel can also be used in the US. It is basically naphtha, also called white gas (although it is **not** unleaded petrol). Its equivalent is available in the UK and Germany, for instance 'Shell' stations sell it as SBP4. For professionals performing indoor fire routines, an eco-friendly fuel is iso-butanol. This burns with a clearly visible flame, generates relatively little smell or soot and is not considered a health risk. These recommended fuels have cool flames. If you accidentally catch the torch at the lit end, or if you drop the club on yourself it will not immediately burn you.

Watch where you left the fuel container - which should be a manufactured metal or plastic fuel container. Clearly mark it with the words 'Highly Inflammable'. Never use a drinks container to store or carry fuel. Keep your fuel away from where you will light, swing or juggle the torches.

Fuel containers should be kept closed at all times, unless actually being poured.

Never use petrol as a fuel, it burns much hotter than paraffin and its vapour is explosive!

Never use meths (methanol). Meths is methylated alcohol or methylated spirits. It is about 90% ethanol which is made poisonous by the addition of methanol, which can damage the optic nerve in the human eye!

Fuelling Up

Pour enough paraffin into an open-topped metal container (e.g. metal bucket or tin) to just cover the torch wick. Dip the torch and wait long enough to allow excess fuel from the wicks to drain back into the container. Once you have dipped and drained, always vigorously **shake off excess fuel before you light up** away from where you are going to perform or practise. Remembering to shake off before lighting a fire torch is very important because otherwise excess fuel on the wicks will fly off while you swing.

Lighting the Torches

Paraffin needs to be quite hot before it will ignite and you may have to hold a match to the wick for up to ten seconds. Once one is lit, others may be lit from it. A fire torch will burn for up to five minutes. Stand so that any wind blows the flames away from you. While you are not actually moving lit torches, hold them upward, so that the flames do not burn the handles or your hands! Remember that heat always rises.

Fire Club Swinging

Fire swinging looks best against a dark background. Wide swinging patterns and those that are fast enough to produce fully circular trails are often the most successful moves. But, I do not recommend attempting snakes unless you do them very fast and are wearing old clothes

Putting Torches Out

In order to keep your torches in prime condition, they should be blown out or smothered with a damp natural fibre cloth or fire blanket before going out on their own. The torches should then be re-dipped in fuel, drained, shaken off and left to cool in a safe place.

When clearing up, pour any unused fuel back into the storage container with a funnel. All equipment should be wiped clean of paraffin with newspaper or a rag cloth which should be put in a dustbin.

Care Of Torches

Maintain your torch wicks, making sure that they are firmly attached to the torch body. The screws holding the wick should be tight, but take care not to over-tighten. Similarly, the screw holding the knob on to the other end of the torch should be regularly tested before use and tightened if necessary. If you repeatedly re-light your torches while they are still hot you will greatly shorten the life of the clubs because they suffer increased heat.

Safety Summary

Fire club swinging is not a dangerous activity if you use your common sense and follow the procedures. However, it is essential to seek expert advice if you are staging a large event as crowd control, fire prevention, first aid, and emergency procedures are all complex issues.

- Warm up thoroughly.
- Wear a hat or tie long hair back and remove any loose clothing.
- Fire swing outdoors, away from potentially flammable objects.
- Use paraffin (kerosene) and thoroughly shake off excess fuel before the torches are lit.
- Secure the lid of the marked fuel container before you begin the show.
- Watch the wind and stand so that the flames blow away from you.
- Warn an audience that it is real fire and therefore dangerous. Tell them that they are not to come closer than a specified safety distance (a minimum of three meters). If busking with fire, define a line which the public cannot cross by the use of a rope.

Never use petrol or meths.

Never use fire if you have drunk any alcohol as your reactions will be too slow for safety.

Simple First Aid

The following paragraph applies to small burns and unbroken skin. More complex injuries should always be referred to medical aid because of possible infection, loss of fluids, shock or other complications.

For minor skin burns, first remove any clothing covering the affected area. Place the bare skin under cold running tap water for **at least 10 minutes**. Wrap the tender area with the cleanest material available.

This chapter is taken from

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and Pole Spinning**

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www.cosmosjugglers.co.uk - see the *Holidays* pages for Anna's annual May and August UK events for club swingers, poi & pole spinners, jugglers, fire enthusiasts and glow-in-the dark/UV performers.